DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 602 SO 024 859

AUTHOR Long, Dianne N.
TITLE Skill Building and Political Science: The Undergraduate Intern Experience.
PUB DATE Sep 94
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (New York, NY, September 1-4, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Clinical Experience; Cooperative Education; *Experiential Learning; *Field Experience Programs; *Field Instruction; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; On the Job Training; Political Science; Practicums; Practicum Supervision; Work Experience Programs

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on approaches to designing and managing the undergraduate intern experience in political science, and its companion disciplines, public administration, and public policy. Specifically, it describes ways of connecting the internship with the undergraduate curriculum to provide skill building experiences for students as part of the course of study. The paper is organized into three sections: (1) rationalizing the internship; (2) designing the experience; (3) designing work for learning styles; and (4) managing the intern program. Personal experiences of 25 years of intern supervisory experience has led to the following conclusions: (1) the soundest, trouble-free programs come from a strong rationale or link to the academic program; (2) these exemplary programs all have a good job design and management; and (3) commitments by faculty, job supervisors, and participating students are all strong. The second on learning styles lists types of placements with a focus on skills. It has a lengthy analysis of the various types of agencies available for placement and what types of skills students may develop. (EH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 383 602

"Skill Building and Political Science: The Undergraduate Intern Experience"

Dianne N. Long
Department of Political Science
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, California 93407

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
DIANNE N. LONG
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Prepared for delivery at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, The New York Hilton, September 1-4, 1994.
Copyright by the American Political Science Association.

SO 024 859

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Skill Building and Political Science: The Undergraduate Intern Experience

Introduction

This paper focuses on approaches to designing and managing the undergraduate intern experience in Political Science, and its companion disciplines, Public Administration and Public Policy. In particular, it describes ways of connecting the internship with the undergraduate curriculum to provide skill building experiences for students as part of the course of study. The paper is organized into three sections: rationalizing the internship, designing the experience, and managing the intern program.

The ideas projected here come from twenty-five years of intern supervisory experience, first with the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development programs, second with Michigan State University's Public Administration program, and lastly with Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo's Political Science program. In each of these experience, I have found that the soundest, trouble-free programs come from a strong rationale or link to the academic program, good job design and management commitments on the part of faculty, job supervisors, and participating student.

Rationalizing the Internship Experience

As a discipline, Political Science is poised as a scholarly enterprise in the humanities linked with History, Philosophy, Arts, and Letters. As a Social Science, it has a major seat along with Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, and Psychology. In both these scholarly families, the primary goals of study have been mastery and expansion of knowledge. Acquisitionof skills as a learning objective has taken a back seat to content mastery in instruction, even thought the social science, particularly Psychology, have accepted experiential and clinical approaches to study and research.

In the academy, it is difficult to consider experiential learning without some reference to defending the provision of academic credit for such experiences and for linking them to the academic program. Increasingly, however, clients (students and their parents) demand to know the relationship of the course of study to jobs and administrators seek less costly ways of delivering instruction. While internships respond to both of these concerns, the main value of the intern program is to broaden and deepen opportunities for intellectual,cultural, and personal growth of the participants.

The student has the opportunity to apply knowledge acquired in university study in a real-world setting, to adapt to organizational life, and to access organization resorces, including computer technology and library or reference materials relative to the work site. Since many colleges and university lack the capability to update the infrastructure in terms of library resources, laboratories, and computer facilities, the work site enhances a student's ability to develop professionally,

The participating organization, on the other hand, has a cheap source of intelligent labor. Whether students receive pay or not, the organization invests supervisory and facilities resources to support each intern. Generally, it does so in return for deepening its capability to provide services and administrative assistance to those programs. Organizations with the most savy in managing a number of interns in a program seem to know best how to access student capabilities.

The faculty supervising internships have the opportunity to develop professional relationships with host organizations which allow faculty through-either consulting or through supervising student work--professional growth.

Institutions as a whole have a need to improve undergraduate involvement in the learning process and point to student involvement as the most important condition for improving undergraduate study. Research by the study teams for the Carnegie Foundationand the National Institute of Education suggest a direct relationship between the time, energy, and effort students devote to learning and persistence in college, satisfaction with the university experience, and general achievement.

Like it or not, the emphasis in education is not only on content, but also on skills-applications in the laboratory, research setting, or work site. Such application demonstrate mastery of content, and--more important--capacity to learn. The push for outcomes assessment where the achievements of graduates are used to justify programs also assists in giving the internship some legitimacy in the academy.

Designing the Internship Experience

The discipline of Political Science has slowly begun to emphasize the undergraduate capstone research course, quantitative methods applications in the curriculum, and the clinical experience through voting behavior studies, teaching assistant experiences, and community service opportunities. Likewise experiential learning common to practitioner preparedness is slowly intruding into the university's Political Science curriculum.

The design of the internship responds to university and community pressures for efficiencies and for curricular relevance. The moving of the learning experience off-campus produces some economies if faculty supervision produced sufficient outputs in terms of student credit units to pay for release from classroom instruction. This topic is addressed in the next section on management of the program. Efficiency for the student translates into getting sufficient units for the experience without holding up a timely graduation. Both close-to-campus and capitol or big-city experiences must be explored. The close-to campus experience allows students to engage in internships along with classroom study. Generally, a 30-hour a week internship should be considered full-time and warrent 9-12 earned units. These situations can be made available during the regular academic year and in the summer. For students working in state capitols and for those working in Washington, D.C. the provision of full-time credit is important to allow students to hold their financial aid and to progress in the program. Usually, earning more than 12 units (quarter or semester) is excessive in a degree program and some clear restriction on experiential credit should be given. A sample intern policy is attached.

The intership program has the capacity for creating learningcommunities of students, faculty and practitioners around intellecthemes and problem solving. The program should increase personal contact between participants (students, faculty and practitioners) to focus on common intellectual interests and job-specific program problem-solving. Such contact also mitigates the isolation on large campuses for both students and faculty. This scholarly inquiry related to the internship allows appropriate monitoring of the activities and provides opporutnities for academic advising and guidance on future independent research projects and independent study. The design of the program should accommodate these features. In this way, the intern program becomes an active learning experience with students taking greater responsibility for their learning in a nurturing environment.

Designing Work for Learning Styles

Each person has a learning style. Some are people oriented and learn through concrete experiences to make reflective observations about their world. Many identify with the study of humanities and Political Science. Others look at a situation abstractly and learn through concreate esperience. They tendto assimilate what is going on.Those in the maths and sciences, the analytical fields, fit this description. Others are convergers who grasp the situation and move quickly toward solutions. The engineering student might fit this group, or one who is unemotional, choosing thing over people. Lastly, there are the accommodators who focus on doing things and having new experience. The business major typifies this group which will do well in new situations and work by trial and error.

Early interviews with those seeking internships will help to identify student learning styles and preferences. For more information on learning styles, see Claxton and MuMurrell's discussion of Kolb's model of experiential learning.

Types of Placements: A Focus on Skills

This discussion presents various placements with a focus on skill attainment related to the normal Political Science curriculum.

American Politics-Campaign Management: The Republican and Democratic party offices are key places for scoping specific opportunites for public opinion research, polling, voter registration campaigns, canvassing, and other jobs related to specific candidate or issue campaigns. Party offices often request interns to manage "communications"--i.e., answer phones--which rarely can be developed into an interesting placement. However, they do maintain listings of campaign managers for specific state, local, and national electoral campaigns. And a quick followup on these can yield good placements in public relaions and events management. Where professional firms exist to do this work, interns may be employed for pay. Strong interpersonal skills are needed for this work as well as adequate face-to-face communications capability. Campaign work enhances student understandings of power and politics and develops interpersonal skills. From these internships, students can develop case studies for earning independent study credit or for developing a senior thesis.

Non-profit Organizational Management: Local governments and United Way organizations annually distribute grants to non-profits. Most of these are human service agencies, educational programs, or arts organizations. These granting agencies have listings of those applying and funded organizations along with descriptions of projects newly funded. Two kinds of operations are common in these organizations: fund raising and events management which involve creativity and good interpersonal skills. Public relations generally involves good writing skills from press releases and grants drafting. There is also room for those with good library skills to track down funding sources to operate programs. Creative people are sought after to assist with artwork and video production. Most of these agencies are thin on staff and it is important to assure that the intern will have adequate supervision/nurturing and a space to work. Also it is important to identify those stand alone projects (needs assessment, for example) which may be best accomplished as an independent study, particularly if the project is somewhat unstructured. It is critical that all agencies provide liability insurance for volunteers, even though the university will cover any accident on the job as long as the student is enrolled in intern credit.

Agencies like hotline/crisis intervention (also hospice) provide strong training programs for students directed toward social work or criminal justice careers. Basically, students in intervention programs learn to strengthen problem solving abilities and interpersonal skills.

Public Administration: Cities, counties, and special districts are ripe for entry-level positions in support of administrative functions (personnel, finance, planning, grants-in-aid, public safety) Opportunities exist for those lacking interpersonal skills, for analytically oriented students, and for people pleasers. Many jurisdictions are willing to create assitant positions from clerical lines or contract positions for pay with research contract line items. For a mere $24,000 a jurisdiction can create 3-4 student positions (20 hours a week X 30+ weeks at $7-10 per hour) Many of these positions provide training and computer instruction as well. In addition to any technical skills, students learn about regulatory practices and administrative processes.

Law/Court Assistance: The District Attorney's office, large criminal law firms, and special offices related to economic crime and victim's assistance are eager to develop programs for students, particularly those anticipating a career in law. Students can be expected to learn how to do legal research, track cases through the courts, and perform preliminary data collection for cases. Some lower courts also develop intern programs where students assist in scheduling and tracking cases.

International Trade Analysis: Increasingly we are aware of the global marketplace. Local business have international markets (manufacturing, publishing, food processing, etc.) where policy, Economics, or business inclined students are happy to work to gain understanding of international trade and gain skills related to contemporary practices of analysis.

Policy Analysis: Almost all large organizations (public and private) have policy divisions which track legislation and assess the impact of policy and proposed policy on operations and markets. Students willing to hone investigative abilities seem to do well in these settings. These internships provide exposure to a multitude of analytical techniques and lobbying tactics. Additionally, faculty-student research teams can be funded by these policy units and by single-issue lobby groups to perform impact assessments and analytical studies.

Lobby/Public Relations Firms: Organizations include public interest groups, League of Women Voters, Common Cause), private interest groups (NOW), environmental organizations (Sierra Club), clubs (Trout Unlimited) political party auxilliaries Business groups (Chamber of Commerce, Boards of Trade), and employee unions (AFL-CIO, electical workers, etc.) Interest

groups form in order to lobby government to protect interests of members or the public. There is a wide range of organizations at national, state, and local levels providing opportunities to get involved in tracking government process, policy, regulations, legislation, and litigation. Also, a part of the organization communicates with the legislators, the media, and members to express the organization's position on proposals. All but the dispassionate have a place in these organizations. Care must be taken to ensure that adequate supervision occurs and that space is available in an office setting for the student to work. It is expected that students will improve both research and communication skills. Issue-related independent study can also be arranged.

Managing the Intern Program

It is necessary for a program to have one (or two) coordinators to serve as a one-stop contact point with the community. A large program may support two positions where each faculty receives one course of assigned time to manage the program. At least 10-12 students should be enrolled to warrant this assignment. When two faculty are involved, some division of specialty should exist.

The coordinator's job is to work with the community in job design, supervise from the university seat, and provide assessment and university credit. Included in these responsibilities is attracting students to placement through faculty referral and advertising in the student newspaper, classes, and posters. Often students can be invited to apply when capacity can be identified throughclassroom instruction.

The coordinator can visit on the phone or in person with agency personnel to map out the specific duties and responsiblities of all parties and to identify the attributes needed for student success Selective advertisement and comprehensive computer or notebook listings can be assembled (possibly using student assistant help). All referrals should be made by the coordinator with but one to three people referred after screening for each position open. Twice as many positions are needed for each expected placement. Once students arrange an interview and accept a placement, a contract letter between the intern and job supervisor is important. following the experience, students should prepare a reflective self-assessment report and the supervisor likewise should prepare a recommendation letter reflecting on the internship. If paper products (research reports and the like) are produced by the intern, they may be submitted for review and return. Credit/no credit grading is preferred.

A survey of graduates can elicit outcome assessment of the intern experience and its value in the academic program. The focus of the survey should be on skills and the positive or negative effects on future graduate study or job placement.

Sources Cited

Claxton, C. S. and P. H. Murrell. Learning Styles: Implications for Improving Education Practices. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report N. 4. Washington, D. C.: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1987.

Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education. Sp onsored by the National Institute of Education. Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education. Washington, D. C.: National Institute of Education, 1994.

Jacobi, M., A. Astin, F. Ayala, Jr. College Student Outcomes Assessment: A Talent Development Perspective. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 7. Washington, D. C.: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1987.

CAL POLY
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93407
POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT
(805) 546-2954

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

GOVERNMENT INTERNSHIP

Progress Reports

Student Name:_____ Date:_____

Student Address:_____

Student Number:_____

Employer Name and Address:_____

_____

INSTRUCTIONS:

The intern will submit to the academic supervisor essay progress reports which evaluate the internship experience. The evaluations should be typed and submitted by the seventh week of each quarter in which the intern is attached to an employer and receiving internship credit.

Only one progress report of 4-6 pages is due each quarter. The report will outline activities, summarize the way experiences relate to the academic program, and suggest ways the program can be improved by the employer and by the university. The intern also will discuss any problems encountered and the features of the experience which appear most valuable. If the student is terminating the experience, please indicate whether or not you would recommend the employer to another student, and whether or not the employer is seeking additional interns.